

# **Committee on Resources,**

## **Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands**

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

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### **Witness Statement**

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**STATEMENT OF  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS,  
RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS  
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
CONCERNING MORMON CRICKETS AND GRASSHOPPERS  
July 19, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, I appreciate having the opportunity to appear before you on the subject of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers and their effects on public lands. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) welcomes Congressional interest on this issue and we look forward to working with the Committee's members on this important subject.

Mormon crickets and grasshoppers are members of the Class Insecta, Order Orthoptera, which contains several hundred species, although only about 35 species are perennial pests. As we have seen this year, Mormon crickets and grasshoppers have the potential for sudden and explosive population increases, which can be so extreme that all vegetation is consumed. The economic effects of extreme infestations affect us all, whether we live on a farm or ranch, in the suburbs, or in the city. Severe infestations threaten the productivity of rangelands, wildlife habitat, and adjacent agricultural land. When outbreaks occur they can also pose health hazards to both humans and grazing animals.

Consider the following effects of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers on various regions of the country:

- The Nevada Department of Agriculture is preparing to make an "Emergency Declaration" as a result of the Mormon cricket infestation. The state will be using Carbaryl bait as needed to keep these insects away from private residences and off of public roads and highways, as a matter of private property protection and public safety. It estimates that 62,000 acres are infested, including over 17,000 acres of BLM-managed lands.
- The Utah Department of Agriculture estimated that in the year 2000, there were over 1.5 million acres of public and private lands infested with Mormon crickets and grasshoppers. During 2001, in Oak City, children have been afraid to go outside because infestations of Mormon crickets have numbered as high as 400-500 in some locations, such as on garage walls and crawling up the sides of homes and across lawns. Some Mormon crickets have died in the city's water supply, thereby making it a health and safety concern to local residents, because of pathogens that these insects can carry. As a result of the severity and impacts of these pests, Governor Leavitt has recently declared the Mormon cricket infestation to be an Agricultural Emergency-the third in the past three years.

- Thus far during 2001, the Utah Department of Agriculture estimates that grasshoppers in Utah have infested an estimated 600,000 acres across 24 counties. Grasshoppers have also grazed several of BLM's fire rehabilitation project sites to the point where they are unusable by ranchers. BLM is considering replanting these fire rehabilitation projects. The cost of doing so is estimated at \$50.00 per acre.

A few examples that illustrate the harmful impacts of Mormon cricket and grasshopper infestations on public lands include:

- Economic effects: Mormon crickets and grasshoppers can diminish yields by 25 to 40 percent on range and croplands. The Utah Department of Agriculture also estimates that as of June, 2001, the agricultural losses from Mormon crickets and grasshoppers in Utah have been estimated at over \$25 million.
- Native plant communities: Mormon crickets, grasshoppers, and drought often cause additional stress to native plant communities. Noxious weeds may increase in numbers because of the competitive advantage they are given due to the preferential grazing of native plants by these pests.
- Wildlife habitat: Even while functioning as a prey base for some species such as sea gulls, large infestations of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers can have a dramatic impact on the plants that grazing animals eat. These pests can devastate the habitat of wildlife species including rabbits, deer, elk, and wild horses.
- Ecosystem function: Where the local impacts of the Mormon cricket and grasshopper infestations are large, the stage is set for invasive plants such as cheatgrass or knapweeds to increase their hold on the ecosystem.

To be fully successful in the fight against Mormon crickets and grasshoppers, any effort must bring together a complex group of stakeholders that includes government agencies, private landowners, and industry. BLM has a very good working relationship with State Departments of Agriculture and our sister federal agencies such as the Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Forest Service.

To cite several examples of such cooperation:

- In the BLM Carson City and Winnemucca Field Offices, personnel are processing Pesticide Use Proposals that would allow treatment by private citizens of Mormon cricket bands on public lands adjacent to private lands at risk.
- The BLM's Spokane, Washington District has cooperated with APHIS, on successfully detecting and controlling Mormon cricket egg beds, resulting in a significant reduction in the cricket population.

In an effort to combat the spread of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers on BLM and adjacent private lands, the BLM spent over \$685,000 during 1999 and 2000 for planning, surveying and responding to emergency outbreaks.

Available resources for this effort in 2001 have been directed toward the following two areas:

- Early Detection - In Nevada and Idaho, BLM has joined with State Departments of Agriculture and APHIS in preseason inventories.
- Control Treatments - BLM has supplied the products necessary for treatment, where and when environmental constraints have been met in Idaho, Nevada and Utah.

The BLM is working with other federal, state, local, and tribal governments and with private landowners to help treat and, when possible, manage serious infestations of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers. Future generations of Americans deserve to inherit ecologically healthy and productive public lands, not vast landscapes denuded and infested with Mormon crickets and grasshoppers that make the public and private lands unfit for people, livestock, and wildlife. We must be committed to developing partnerships to address the infestation of Mormon crickets and grasshoppers so that the spread of these pests can be prevented or controlled. For that reason, we welcome the increasing awareness and understanding of this problem by legislators at the national level.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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